

Service. I want to thank all the National Park Service employees for their hard work.

I appreciate Dr. Robert Schuller for leading the invocation. I want to thank our fabulous entertainers for entertaining us to-night.

We have gathered for this ceremony for more than 80 years. We come together to celebrate a simple and inspiring story. It's a story of a miraculous birth in a humble place. It is a story of a single life that changed the world and continues to change hearts. And for two millennia, this story has carried the message that God is with us and He offers His love to every man, woman, and child.

During the Christmas season, we seek to reflect that love in our lives. Millions of Americans will celebrate at home in fellowship with friends and family. Millions will reach out with a compassionate hand to help brothers and sisters in need. And all will give thanks to the bonds of love and affection that bring fulfillment to our lives and the hope of peace around the world.

At this time of year, we give thanks for the brave men and women in uniform who are serving our Nation. Many of those who

have answered the call of duty will spend this Christmas season far from home and separated from family. We honor their sacrifice. We are proud of their service and that of their families. We will keep them close to our hearts and in our prayers.

And now, as an expression of our own hope for peace in this Christmas season, we will light the National Tree. We've asked three representatives from the National Park Service's Junior Ranger Program to help. The Junior Ranger Program teaches children and families about science, nature, and stewardship of our national parks.

And so Attiyah Jenkins, Stephen Scott, and Dana Bederson will help me light the National Christmas Tree. Come on up, guys.

I ask all of you to join us in the countdown: five, four, three, two, one.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Vin Cipolla, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; and Robert H. Schuller, minister, Reformed Church in America.

Remarks Following a Meeting With Congressional Leaders *December 8, 2006*

I want to thank the Members of Congress—both Houses, both political parties—for joining me and the Vice President and members of my team. We just had a very constructive conversation. We talked about Iraq. We talked about the need for a new way forward in Iraq, and we talked about the need to work together on this important subject. We also talked about other key issues.

I assured the leaders that the White House door will be open when the new Congress shows up. And I think we ought

to meet on a regular basis; I believe there's consensus toward that. And the reason you meet on a regular basis is so that the American people can know that we're working hard to find common ground. That's what they expect us to do; they expect us to work on big problems and solve them.

I want to say something about my two friends here. Senator Frist, we appreciate your service to the United States of America. You brought a lot of dignity to the office. And I appreciate the Speaker being,

as well—Mr. Speaker, you’ve done a fine job as Speaker.

I look forward to working with Senator Reid and Congresswoman Pelosi for doing what’s right for the country. And again, I want to thank you all for coming down. I appreciate your interest, appreciate your

advice, appreciate the input that you’ve given.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:16 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Thabo Mvuyelwa Mbeki of South Africa December 8, 2006

President Bush. It’s been my honor to welcome a man for whom I have a great deal of respect, and that is the President of South Africa, President Mbeki, here back to the Oval Office. I so very much appreciate the time you’ve given and the great discussion we just had.

We talked about a wide range of subjects. We talked about Darfur and the need for South Africa and the United States and other nations to work with the Sudanese Government to enable a peacekeeping force into that country to facilitate aid and save lives. And I expressed my concerns about the situation with the President. He shares my concerns that the situation is dire. And now is the time for action. And I appreciate your thoughts, Mr. President.

We talked about, interestingly enough, the Darfur [Doha]* round. The President is concerned about whether or not the World Trade Organization round will go forward. He recognizes, like I recognize, that trade will lift more people out of poverty than any other mechanism. And I told the President, I am committed to the Darfur [Doha]* round. I believe in trade, and I believe in the necessity of trade. And so we’ll work to see if we can’t get that issue solved.

We talked about a lot of issues. We talked about Iran; we talked about the Mid-

dle East; we talked about our bilateral relations and his Government’s commitment to fighting HIV/AIDS and our willingness to provide over \$600 million to the folks in South Africa to help deal with this terrible pandemic.

I would call our relations strong and good and necessary. And Mr. President, welcome back, and the floor is yours.

President Mbeki. Thank you very much, President. Well, I was very glad, indeed, that we had this opportunity to meet with the President to discuss precisely these matters that he has indicated. Of course of immediate importance to us is the support we get from the President and the U.S. Government with regard to the resolution of these African conflicts.

And indeed, we are, all of us, keenly interested that we must increase the troops deployed in Darfur, to address these issues that the President mentioned, and hopefully, the Security Council will move quickly on that to do that larger deployment of troops. It’s very urgent, very necessary, and we will absolutely do everything to make sure that, from the African side, we remove any obstacles that might be to such bigger deployment in Darfur. It’s very necessary.

* White House correction.